

# WHAT CONGRESS AND GANDHI HAVE DONE TO THE UNTOUCHABLES

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## APPENDIX IV

### STATEMENT BY B. R. AMBEDKAR ON GANDHI'S FAST

*Statement on Mr. Gandhi's attitude at the Round Table Conference to the Untouchables and their demand for Constitutional Safeguards, 19th September 1932.*

I need hardly say that I was astounded to read the correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Samuel Hoare and the Prime Minister, which was published recently in the Papers, in which he has expressed his determination to starve himself unto death till the British Government of its own accord or under pressure of public opinion revise their opinion and withdraw their scheme of communal representation for the Depressed Classes. The unenviable position, in which I have been placed by the Mahatma's vow of self-immolation, can easily be imagined.

It passes my comprehension why Mr. Gandhi should stake his life on an issue arising out of the communal question which he, at the Round Table Conference, said was one of a comparatively small importance. Indeed, to adopt the language of those of Mr. Gandhi's way of thinking, the communal question was only an appendix to the book of India's constitution and not the main chapter. It would have been justifiable, if Mr. Gandhi had resorted to this extreme step for obtaining independence for the country on which he was so insistent all through the R. T. C. debates. It is also a painful surprise that Mr. Gandhi should single out special representation for the Depressed Classes in the Communal Award as an excuse for his self-immolation. Separate electorates are granted not only to the Depressed Classes, but to the Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, as well as to the Mohammedans and the Sikhs. Also separate electorates are granted to landlords, labourers and traders. Mr. Gandhi had declared his opposition to the special representation of every other class and creed except the Mohammedans and the Sikhs.. All the same, Mr, Gandhi chooses to let everybody else except the Depressed Classes retain the special electorates given to them.

The fears expressed by Mr. Gandhi about the consequences of the

arrangements for the representation of the Depressed Classes are, in my opinion, purely imaginary. If the nation is not going to be split up by separate electorates to the Mohammedans and the Sikhs, the Hindu society cannot be said to be split up if the Depressed Classes are given separate electorates. His conscience is not aroused if the nation is split by the arrangements of Special Electorates for classes and communities other than the Depressed Classes.

I am sure many have felt that if there was any class which deserved to be given special political rights in order to protect itself against the tyranny of the majority under the Swaraj constitution it was the Depressed Classes. Here is a class which is undoubtedly not in a position to sustain itself in the struggle for existence. The religion to which they are tied, instead of providing for them an honourable place, brands them as lepers, not fit for ordinary intercourse. Economically, it is a class entirely dependent upon the high-caste Hindus for earning its daily bread with no independent way of living open to it. Nor are all ways closed by reason of the social prejudices of the Hindus but there is a definite attempt all throughout the Hindu Society to bolt every possible door so as not to allow the Depressed Classes any opportunity to rise in the scale of life. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to say that in every village the caste Hindus, however divided among themselves, are always in a standing conspiracy to put down in a 'merciless manner any attempt on the part of the Depressed Classes who form a small and scattered body of an ordinary Indian citizen.

In *these* circumstances, it would be granted by all fair-minded persons that as the only path for a community so handicapped to succeed in the struggle for life against organised tyranny, some share of political power in order that it may protect itself is a paramount necessity.

I should have thought that a well-wisher of the Depressed Classes would have fought tooth and nail for securing to them as much political power as might be possible in the new Constitution. But the Mahatma's ways of thinking are strange and are certainly beyond my comprehension. He not only does not endeavour to augment the scanty political power which the Depressed Classes have got under the Communal Award, but on the contrary he has staked his very life in order to deprive them of little they have got. This is not the first attempt on the part of the Mahatma to completely dish the Depressed Classes out of political existence. Long before, there was the Minorities Pact. The Mahatma tried to enter into an agreement with the Muslims and the Congress. He offered to the Muslims all the fourteen claims which they had put forth on their behalf, and in return asked them to join with him in testing the claims for social representation made by me on behalf of the Depressed

Classes.

It must be said to the credit of the Muslim delegates, that they refused to be a party to such a black act, and saved the Depressed Class from 'what might as well have developed into a calamity for them as a result of the combined opposition of the Mohammedans and Mr. Gandhi.

I am unable to understand the ground of hostility of Mr. Gandhi to the Communal Award. He says that the Communal Award has separated' the Depressed Classes from the Hindu Community. On the other hand,- Dr. Moonje, a much stronger protagonist of the Hindu case and a militant advocate of its interests, takes a totally different view of the matter. In the speeches which he has been delivering since his arrival from London, Dr. Moonje has been insisting that the Communal Award does not create any separation between the Depressed Class and the Hindus. Indeed, he has been boasting that he has defeated me in my attempt to politically separate the Depressed Class from the Hindus. I am sure that Dr. Moonje is right in his interpretation of the Communal Award although, I am not sure that the credit of it can legitimately go to Dr. Moonje. It is therefore surprising that Mahatma Gandhi who is a nationalist and not known to be a communalist should read the Communal Award, in so far as it relates to the Depressed Class, in a manner quite contrary to that of a communalists like Dr. Moonje. If Dr. Moonje does not sense any separation of the Depressed Classes from the Hindus in the Communal Award the Mahatma ought to feel quite satisfied on that score. In my opinion, that Communal Award should not only satisfy the Hindus, but also satisfy those individuals among the Depressed Classes such as Rao Bahadur Rajah, Mr. Baloo or Mr. Govai, who are in favour of Joint Electorates. Mr. Rajah's fulminations in the Assembly have amused me considerably. An intense supporter of Separate Electorates and the bitterest and the most vehement critic of caste Hindu tyranny, now professes faith in the Joint Electorates and love for the Hindus ! How much of that is due to his natural desire to resuscitate himself from the oblivion in which he was cast by his being kept out of the Round Table Conference and how much of it is to his honest change of faith, I do not propose to discuss.

The points on which Mr. Rajah is harping by way of criticism on the Communal Award are two: One is that the Depressed Classes have gained lesser number of seats than they are entitled to on the population basis, and the other is that the Depressed Classes have been separated from the Hindu fold.

I agree in his first grievance, but when the Rao Bahadur begins to accuse those who represented the Depressed Classes at the R. T. C. for having sold their rights, I am bound to point out what Mr. Rajah did as a member of the

Indian Central Committee. In that Committee's report, the Depressed Classes were given in Madras 10 seats out of 150; in Bombay 8 seats out of 14; in Bengal 8 seats out of 200 ; in U. P. 8 seats out of 182; in the Punjab 6 seats out of 150 ; in Behar and Orissa 6 out of 150; in C. P. 8 out of 125 and in Assam, 9 seats for the Depressed Classes and the indigenous and primitive races out of 75. I do not wish to overburden this statement by pointing out how this distribution compares with the population ratio. But there can be no doubt that this meant a terrible under-representation of the Depressed Classes. To this distribution of seats Mr. Rajah was a party. Surely, Mr. Rajah, before he criticises the Communal Award and accuses others, should refresh his memory of what he accepted as Member of the Indian Central Committee on behalf of the Depressed Classes without any protest. If the population ratio of representation was to him a natural right of Depressed Classes and its full realisation was a necessity for their protection, why did not Mr. Rajah insist upon it in the Central Committee when he had an opportunity to do so?

As to his contention that in the Communal Award, the Depressed Classes have been separated from the caste Hindus, it is a view to which I cannot subscribe. If Mr. Rajah has any conscientious objection to separate Electorates, there is no compulsion on him to stand as a candidate in the Separate Electorates. The opportunity to stand as a candidate in the general electorate as well as the right to vote in it are there, and Mr. Rajah is free to avail himself of the same. Mr. Rajah is crying at the top of his voice to assure to the Depressed Classes that there is a complete change of heart on the part of the Caste Hindus towards the Depressed Class. He will have the opportunity to prove that fact to the satisfaction of the Depressed Class, who are not prepared to take his word by getting himself elected in the general constituency. The Hindus, who profess love and sympathy for the Depressed Classes, will have also an opportunity to prove their *bona fides* by electing Mr. Rajah to the legislature.

The Communal Award, therefore, in my opinion, satisfied both those who want separate Electorates and those who want joint Electorates. In this sense, it is already a compromise and should be accepted as it is. As to the Mahatma, I do not know what he wants. It is assumed that although Mahatma Gandhi is opposed to the system of separate electorates, he is not opposed to the system of Joint Electorates and Reserved Seats. That is a gross error. Whatever his views are today, while in London he was totally opposed to any system of Special representation for the Depressed Classes whether by joint Electorates or by Separate Electorates. Beyond the right to vote in a general electorate based upon Adult Suffrage, he was not prepared to concede

anything to the Depressed Classes by way of securing their representation in the legislatures. This was the position he had taken at first. Towards the end of the R. T. C. he suggested to me a scheme, which he said, he was prepared to consider. The scheme was purely conventional without any constitutional sanction behind it and without any single seat being reserved for the Depressed Classes in the electoral law. The scheme was as follows :

Depressed Class candidates might stand in the general electorate as against other high caste Hindu candidates. If any Depressed Class Candidate was defeated in the election, he should file an election petition and obtain the verdict that he was defeated because he was an Untouchable. If such a decision was obtained, the Mahatma said he would undertake to induce some Hindu members to resign and thus create a vacancy. There would be then another election in which the defeated Depressed Class candidate or any other Depressed Class candidate might again try his luck as against the Hindu candidates. Should he be defeated again, he should get similar verdict that he was defeated because he was an Untouchable and so on *ad infinitum*. I am disclosing these facts as some people are even now under the impression that the Joint Electorates and Reserved Seats would satisfy the conscience of the Mahatma. This will show why I insist that there is no use discussing the question until the actual proposals of the Mahatma are put forth.

I must, however, point out that I cannot accept the assurances of the Mahatma that he and his Congress will do the needful. I cannot leave so important a question as the protection of my people to conventions and understandings. The Mahatma is not an immortal person, and the Congress, assuming it is not a malevolent force, is not to have an abiding existence. There have been many Mahatmas in India whose sole object was to remove Untouchability and to elevate and absorb the Depressed Classes, but every one of them has failed in his mission. Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained as Untouchables.

I have enough experience of the pace of Reform and the faith of Hindu reformers in the conflicts that have taken place at Mahad and Nasik, to say that no well-wisher of the Depressed Classes will ever consent to allow the uplift of the Depressed Classes to rest upon such treacherous shoulders. Reformers who in moments of crises prefer to sacrifice their principles rather than hurt the feelings of their kindred can be of no use to the Depressed Classes.

I am therefore bound to insist upon a Statutory guarantee for the protection of my people. If Mr. Gandhi wishes to have the Communal Award altered, it is for him to put forth his proposals and to prove that they give a better

guarantee than has been given to us under the Award.

I hope that the Mahatma will desist from carrying out the extreme step contemplated by him. We mean no harm to the Hindu society when we demand separate electorates. If we choose separate electorates, we do so in order to avoid the total dependence on the sweet will of the Caste Hindus in matters affecting our destiny. Like the Mahatma we also claim our right to err, and we expect him not to deprive us of that right. His determination to fast himself unto death is worthy of a far better cause. I could have understood the propriety of the Mahatma contemplating such extreme step for stopping riots between Hindus and Mohammedans or between the Depressed Classes and the Hindus or any other national cause. It certainly cannot improve the lot of the Depressed Classes. Whether he knows it or not, the Mahatma's act will result in nothing but terrorism by his followers against the Depressed Classes all over the country.

Coercion of this sort will not win the Depressed Classes to the Hindu fold if they are determined to go out. And if the Mahatma chooses to ask the Depressed Classes to make a choice between Hindu faith and possession of political power, I am quite sure that the Depressed Classes will choose political power and save the Mahatma from self-immolation. If Mr. Gandhi coolly reflects on the consequences of his act, I very much doubt whether he will find this victory worth having. It is still more important to note that the Mahatma is releasing reactionary and uncontrollable forces, and is fostering the spirit of hatred between the Hindu Community and the Depressed Classes by resorting to this method and thereby widening the existing gulf between the two. When I opposed Mr. Gandhi at the R. T. C., there was a hue and cry against me in the country and there was a conspiracy in the so-called nationalist press to represent me as a traitor to the nationalist cause, to suppress correspondence coming from my side and to boost the propaganda against my party by publishing exaggerated reports of meetings and conferences, many of which were never held. "Silver bullets" were freely used for creating divisions *in* the ranks of the Depressed Classes. There have been also a few clashes ending in violence.

If the Mahatma does not want all this to be repeated on a larger scale, let him, for God's sake, reconsider his decision and avert the disastrous consequences, I believe the Mahatma does not want this. But if he does not desist, in spite of his wishes these consequences are sure to follow as night follows the day.

Before concluding this statement, I desire to assure the public that although I am entitled to say that I regard the matter as closed, I am prepared to consider the proposals of the Mahatma. I how' ever trust the Mahatma will not

drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of my people. For I can never consent to deliver my people bound hand and foot to the .Caste Hindus for generations to come.

B. R. AMBEDKAR.

## APPENDIX V

### TEMPLE ENTRY IN TRAVANCORE

His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore issued a Proclamation «n the 12th November 1936 opening the Temples in the State to the Untouchables. The Proclamation reads as follows :—

"Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries adapted itself to the need of the changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth, caste or community, be denied the consolation and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by us and our Government."

A great lot has been made by the Congressmen and by Mr. Gandhi about this Proclamation. It is regarded as heralding the birth of a new conscience in the Hindu world. I don't feel quite so sure of this. At any rate there are facts on the other side, which are worth bearing in mind.

The proclamation was issued by the Maharaja of Travancore in his name. But the real active force behind the scene was the Prime Minister, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. It is his motives that we must understand. In 1932, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer was also the Prime Minister of Travancore. In 1932, when Mr. Gandhi had raised a controversy over the entry of the Untouchables into the Guruvayur Temple, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer had taken part in the controversy on the side of those who were against Temple Entry. In the course of this controversy, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer issued a statement (*Times of India dated November 10, 1932*) to the Press.

This is what he said :

"Personally I do not observe caste rules. I realise there are strong, though not very articulate, feelings in this matter in the minds of men who believe that the present system of temple worship and its details are based on divine ordinances. The problem can be permanently solved only by a process of

mutual adjustment and by the awakening of religious and social leaders of Hindu society to the realities of the present situation and to the need for preserving the solidarity of the Hindu community.

"Shock tactics will not answer the purpose and direct action will be even more fatal in this sphere than in the political. I have the misfortune to differ from Mr. Gandhi when he says that the problem of temple-entry can be divorced from such topics as interdining and I agree with Dr. Ambedkar that the social and economic uplift of the Depressed Classes should be our immediate and urgent programme."

This statement shows that in 1933 spiritual considerations did not move Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. Spiritual considerations have become operative after 1933. What made Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer take a different view in 1936 ? What had happened in Travancore in 1936 to compel this change of opinion ? It may be recalled that in 1936, there was held in Travancore a Conference of the Yezawa Community. The Yezawas are an Untouchable community spread over Malabar. It is an educated community and economically quite strong. It is also a vocal community and has been carrying on agitation in the State against social and religious disabilities. The Conference was held to consider whether the Yezawas should not abandon the Hindu Religion in favour of some other religion(**This was in pursuance of the decision taken at Yeola in 1935 under my chairmanship** ). The Yezawas form a very large community. The cessation of so large a community would be death-knell to the Hindus and the Conference had made the danger real.

It may not be far fetched to say that the Proclamation was issued to forestall this danger. If this is correct, there is very little spiritual substance behind the proclamation. It must not be forgotten that Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer has his own way of giving spiritual colouring to a material act. The Brahmins have been, in accordance with the Hindu Law, exempt from capital punishment which applied to all Brahmins. This was a very glaring case of discrimination. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer very recently announced the abolition of capital punishment in Travancore State and took credit for having carried out a great humanitarian Reform. As a matter of fact, the object was really preventing the Brahmin from being brought under the guillotine in obedience to the principle of equality before law.

How far did this Proclamation change facts and how far it has remained a show ? It is not possible to get real facts as they exist in Travancore. In the course of the discussion on the Malabar Temple Entry Bill in the Madras Legislative Assembly, certain facts relating to Travancore were mentioned by Sir T. Pannirselvam which, if true, would show that the whole thing is hollow.

Sir T. Pannirselvam said ;—



"One of the arguments advanced by the Premier in support of the measure was that temples in Travancore had been thrown open to the 'Untouchables.' A Maharaja vested with autocratic powers did so by an order. But how was it working there ? From representations received, he was led to believe that after the first flush of enthusiasm, Harijans had left off going to temples, and people who used to worship previously before Harijans were allowed to enter the temples, had stopped worshipping in temples. He would ask the Government to tell them if the measure was really a success in Travancore."

On the third reading of the Bill, Sir T. Pannirselvam made a statement which must have come as a surprise to many. He said :

"He wanted to know whether it was a fact that the private temples of the Senior Maharani were excluded from the Proclamation. What was the reason for it ? Again during the celebration of the marriage of the daughter of the Senior Maharani, it was found necessary, so he was told, to perform purificatory ceremony of the temple. If such a purification of temples took place, what happened to the Proclamation ? "

These facts were not challenged by anybody, either by Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer or C. Rajagopalachariar. Evidently, they cannot be challenged. If they are incontrovertible, then the less said about the Malabar Temple Entry Proclamation as a spiritual testament, the better.

Is this Temple Entry in Travancore the be-all and end-all of the social reform in Travancore ? Is there to be just Temple Entry and no further or is it going to lead to equality in the matter of religious status ? Will, for instance, the Devasthan Department be placed in the hands of the Untouchables and the Shudras ? Nine years since the Proclamation have passed, there has been no move in democratisation of religion in Travancore.

Will the Untouchables of Travancore have to pay for Temple Entry ? I am not in a position to say. But I like to reproduce below a letter addressed to me by Sri Narayan Swami of the All-Travancore Pulayar Cheramar Aykia Maha Sangham. It is dated 24th November 1938.

"Camp Mayyanad  
Quilon, 24-11-1938.

To Dr, Ambedkar,  
Bombay.

RESPECTED SIR,

I have unaffected pleasure to draw your attention to the following facts for obtaining the valuable advice from you. Being the leader of a Harijan Community of the Travancore State, I think, it is my paramount duty to suggest you definitely all the grievances that the Harijans of this State are enduring.

1. The Temple Entry Proclamation issued by His Highness The Maharaja is

indeed a boon to Harijans ; but the Harijans are enjoying all the other social disabilities except the temple Entry. The Government do not take any step for the amelioration of the Harijans.

2. Among 15 lakhs of Harijans, there are a few graduates, half a dozen undergraduates and 50 school finals and more than 200 vernacular certificates holders. Though the Government have appointed a Public Service Commission, appointments to the Harijans are very few. All the appointments are given to Savarnas. If a Harijan is appointed, it will be for one week or two weeks. According to the rules of the recruitment in Public Service, the applicant is allowed to apply only after a year again. While a Savarna will be appointed for a year or more. When the list of the appointments is brought before the Assembly, the number of appointments will be equal to the communal representation; but the duration of the post of all the Harijans will be equal to one Savarna. This kind of fraud is associating with the officials. Thus the public service is a common property of the Savarnas. No Harijan is benefited by it.
3. There was a proclamation from H. H. The Maharaja, a few years ago that three acres of ground should be given to each Harijan to live in; but the officials are Savarnas who are always unwilling to carry out the proclamation. Even though the Government is willing to grant large extent of ground for pasturing near towns, not a piece of the ground is given to the Harijans. The Harijans are still living in the compounds of the Savarnas and are undergoing manifold difficulties. Though large extents of ground lay in "Reserve," the applications of the Harijans for granting grounds are not at all regarded with importance or listened to. The most parts of *the* lands are benefited by the Savarnas.
4. The Government nominates every year, for the election of members of the Assembly, one member from each Harijan Com. munity. Though they are elected to present the grievances of the Harijans before the Assembly, they are found to be the machinery of the Government, viz., the toys of the Savarna officers, who are benefited by them. Thus the grievances of the Harijans cannot be redressed any way.
5. All the Harijans of Travancore are labourers in the fields and compounds. They are the servants of the Savarnas who behave with them as beasts—nobody to look after for protection. Every Harijan gets only 2 chs (one anna) as the wage in most parts of the State. The social disabilities are the same to them even after the Temple Entry. The workers in the factories in various parts of the State of Travancore and the Officers of the State are all Savarnas and they are at present agitating for responsible Government. Now the Harijans are demanding jobs in Government and in

factories but the agitation in Travancore is a Savaroa agitation by which the Savarnas are making arrangements to get rid of Harijans in Public Service and factories. They plead for higher salaries and more privileges. They pay the least care to the Harijan labourers while the people of Travancore are maddened with the agitation of the workers in the factories. The standard of salary of Harijan worker is very low while the standard of a factory worker is thrice the former.

6. Due to starvation and want of proper means of livelihood, the heads of the children of Harijans are heated as a result of which they are likely to fail in school. Before proclamation, the duration of Concession in high schools was for 6 years; now, it has been reduced to three years by which a good number of students stopped their education after their failure.
7. There is a department for the Depressed Classes, the head of which is Mr. C. O. Damodaran (the protector of the Backward Communities). Though every year a big amount is granted for the expenditure, at the end of the year, two-thirds of the sum is lapsed by his sagacity. He used to submit reports to the Government that there is no way of spending the amount. Ninety-five per cent of the sum allotted for the Depressed Class is spent as the salary of the officials who are always Savarnas and 5 per cent. is benefited. Now the Government is going to make some colonies in three parts of Travancore. The officers are Savarnas. This scheme is, in my opinion, not a success for the Government do not pay greater attention to it. I regret that Travancore Government spends one anna for the Harijan cause, while Cochin State spends a rupee, for the same.
8. The majority of the subjects of Travancore are now agitating strongly for Responsible Government under an organisation 'The State Congress.' The leaders of this popular organisation belong to the four major communities of the State, namely, the Nair, Mahomedan, Christian and Ezhava community. The President of the State Congress Mr. Thanu Pillai issued a statement in which he stressed that special concessions would be given to the Depressed Class. All the leaders of the Depressed Class have been awaiting for a time to see the attitude of the State Congress. Now we come to understand that there is no reality in the promise of these leaders.
9. Now I am sure that the leaders have neglected the cause of the Depressed Class. The State Congress was started on the principles of nationalism and now it has become an institution of communalism. Communal spirit is now working among the leaders. In every public speech, statement or article, the leaders mention only these four major communities, while they have no thought on us. I fear, if this is the case of

the leaders of the political agitation of Travancore, the situation of the Depressed Class will be more deplorable when the Responsible Government is achieved, for the entire possession of the Government will be then within the clutches of the above mentioned communities and the Depressed Classes' rights and privileges will be devoured by the former. In the meetings of the working committee of the States Congress, two-thirds of the time was devoted in discussion concerning the strike of the Alleppey Coir Factories; but nothing was mentioned in the meeting about the Harijan workers who are undergoing manifold difficulties. The workers in Factories are Savarnas and the agitation for obtaining Responsible Government is a kind of anti-Harijan movement. The motive of every leader of the State Congress is to improve the situation (circumstance) of the Savarna. The leaders of the major communities have some mercenary attitude who are going to sacrifice the Depressed for their progress.

10. These are the conditions of the Depressed Class of the State. What are the ways by which we have to establish our rights in the State ? I humbly request you to be good enough to render me your advice at this occasion. I am awaiting for the reply. Excuse me for the trouble,

Yours faithfully,

SHRI

NARAYANASWAMI

If the plan of Temple Entry is ultimately to deprive the Untouchables of their statutory rights, then the movement is not only not spiritual but it is positively mischievous and it would be the duty of all honest people to warn the Untouchables.

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